



The iconic Fox Theatre in Boulder's University Hill neighborhood

Uphill Battle

Boulder aims to turn the Hill into something more than a student-driven collection of take-out eateries, coffeeshops, and record stores.

FROM SEPTEMBER TO MAY, the Hill in Boulder quakes with student foot traffic, then goes dormant throughout summer. But change is coming, and it's not just a new pizza joint. A recent effort from city officials and business owners aims to transform University Hill—bounded by University and College avenues and Broadway and 12th Street—from a seasonal, student-driven commercial district to a year-round destination with diverse restaurants, shopping, and events.

Residents and business owners insist the long-term vitality of the area is dependent on the change. Sure, lower rents (compared to Pearl Street) may lure businesses, but the Hill today isn't a place where they can grow. In an area where student housing makes up roughly 50 percent of the residences, businesses must grapple with a drop in patronage once finals are over. And fewer customers mean less revenue, which explains the Hill's ongoing game of retail musical chairs: a rotating cast of taco stands and coffeeshops that primarily cater to University of Colorado Boulder students.

Sarah Wiebenson, the community development coordinator for the neighborhood, says a more viable Hill would be student-friendly but not student-exclusive. She envisions a kind of Pearl Street Mall equivalent, where families and non-Buffs can find something for them too. A brewpub, a Whole Foods Market-esque store, a post office, a Pharmaca, and more restaurants like the upscale five-year-old Cafe Aion top the list of desires, according to a recent City of Boulder survey.

Bettering life on the Hill became an official priority for the city in November with the passage of ballot measure 2A, which calls for overall improvements to the neighborhood, including the conversion of Pennsylvania Street into an "event street" with outdoor seating and the option to close it to cars for special occasions. The University Hill Commercial Area Management Commission (UHCAMC), a group of business owners and residents set up to advise Boulder's city council, also has pitched a host of new amenities—a band shell, more parking, a boutique hotel, and more second-level office space. "Those would be backbones," says Dakota Soifer, the owner of Cafe Aion and a UHCAMC member. The hope is those elements would encourage the arrival of new restaurants and shops to help shape the Hill into a funky neighborhood fit for all kinds of people—in all seasons. —SARAH PROTZMAN HOWLETT

PARK AVENUE

White-picket-fence dreams bloom just south of Chatfield Reservoir.

Attention, families flocking to the southern suburbs for good schools, low crime rates, and easy access to the foothills: Highlands Ranch is officially full. Founded in 1981, the neighborhood will see construction on its final homes completed in the next five years. ¶ Fortunately, the coveted burb's successor broke ground in June. Situated just southeast of Chatfield and Roxborough state parks, Sterling Ranch's 12,000 homes will have sidewalk access to more than 30 miles of in-neighborhood trails that connect to the parks. Homeowners will also get annual Colorado State Parks passes every year (the cost is wrapped into the neighborhood's HOA fees). "We want to embrace the natural assets that surround the development," says Jim Yates, president and CFO of Sterling Ranch. "Our plan just makes the park passes part of moving into the community." ¶ Sterling Ranch has been on the drawing board for more than a decade. That's how long it took to piece together management plans for schools, roads, and—the biggest sticking point—water. Finding enough H₂O to keep 12,000 more lawns green

A rendering of Sterling Ranch's Lake Plaza, coming soon



in an already arid part of the state required some fancy finagling, both bureaucratically and technologically. But a joint agreement with the South Metro Water Supply Authority, Denver Water, and Aurora Water allowed Sterling Ranch to overcome the burden it might place on local aquifers with a system that captures and reuses treated Denver and Aurora wastewater from the South Platte River. Now that a solid blueprint is in place, construction this summer will mark the first of three building phases, with move-ins scheduled for spring 2016. Southward, ho! —LRM